

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 367

CG 029 941

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TITLE "Being a Decent Human Being Is a Modern Way To Be a Warrior."
PUB DATE 1998-12-00
NOTE 6p.; In: "Relating in a Global Community." Proceedings of the International Conference on Counseling in the 21st Century (7th, Sydney, Australia, December 29-31, 1998); see CG 029 933.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; *Adolescent Development; Adolescents; *At Risk Persons; Behavior Theories; Counseling; *Cultural Pluralism; Dreams; Elementary Secondary Education; Intervention; *Navajo (Nation)
IDENTIFIERS Maslow (Abraham); Prayer; *Transpersonal Psychology

ABSTRACT

As the Navajo nation undergoes rapid assimilation and modernization, counseling needs of the Navajo children have changed in ways similar to counseling needs in developing or "Eastern Block" nations. An adolescent sub-culture, full of at-risk behaviors, is epidemic worldwide. The paper states that a multicultural perspective can provide part of the answer. Abraham Maslow's Transpersonal Psychology can provide both a multicultural and spiritual approach to support clients on their journey towards a better future. It suggests that what is needed is an approach to consciously and deliberately foster self-actualization in the midst of adversity, and Transpersonal Psychology is a tool to accomplish this. Some methods and tools from Transpersonal Psychology include dream work, meditation/relaxation, affirmations, simple rituals, prayer, and therapeutic touch. (JDM)

Being a Decent Human Being is a Modern Way to be a Warrior

By

Darlita J. Blanc

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" BEING A DECENT HUMAN BEING IS A MODERN WAY TO BE A WARRIOR"

Larry Anderson, Navajo Elder

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Introduction

The counseling needs of Navajo children and families have changed during the last twenty-five years as the Navajo Nation has undergone rapid assimilation and modernization. Many of these needs are similar to the counseling needs in other indigenous cultures, developing nations, the newly democratized "Eastern Block", as well as industrialized nations and the modern West.

An adolescent sub-culture with "at risk" behaviors is epidemic world wide. The accompanying dramatic changes in the culture, language, and family structure of most nations are seen as resulting in part from the introduction of satellite TV, videos, Heavy Metal Music, and other media. Modern Western countries have not solved these problems. There are increasing needs resulting from poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, gang activity, teenage suicide, discrimination and etc.

During the past twenty-five years there have been dramatic rapid changes on the Navajo Reservation which mirror this global trend. There is an extreme need for services with very limited resources.

We are all in this together. Our children are the holders of the future for us all. We need to network globally for solutions. When respect for culture, self, others, and life itself is lost, how is it reclaimed?

For the Navajo, the establishment of Medicine Man Apprenticeship Programs by the Navajo Nation is part of the recognized need to return to traditional cultural values and spiritual practices.

A Multicultural spiritual perspective can provide part of the way back/out/forward. This approach can be utilized worldwide.

Transpersonal Psychology

1. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow is known for his hierarchy of needs pyramid. Safety and food and shelter are at the base of the pyramid, belonging and self esteem in the middle, and self actualization at the top. No one argues with this paradigm of what we need to become who we can be.

Poverty, substance abuse, family violence, high crime rates, and discrimination all interfere with these basic needs being met and therefore prevent self actualization. Self actualization implies the realization of

potential across a broad spectrum, physical and emotional health, education, relationships, and occupation throughout the life span of an individual.

2. The Transcending Self Actualizer

What is not commonly known is the Maslow's pyramid was not topped by self actualization. There is another layer. This final layer is strangely censored in the mainstream universities of the modern West. Maslow's hierarchy ends with Transcendence. Transcendence is just above self actualization. Maslow's last book was entitled "The Farther Reaches of Human Nature". Transcendence means an individual's experience of "oneness" with the creator and creation. Maslow's list of the traits that typify the transcending self actualizer are a list of the traits that would also describe the typical traditional Navajo Person as well as other indigenous peoples. Maslow does not say this and so I must assume he did not realize this.

3. The Association For Transpersonal Psychology

Maslow was a founder of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology, ATP, in 1971. His definition of Transpersonal Psychology was, "beyond the personality and having to do with the wisdom of the soul". Transpersonal Psychology is often called the fourth force in psychology. The third force being Humanistic psychology preceded by behavioral psychology as the first force and cognitive psychology as the second force.

The field of Transpersonal Psychology has rediscovered what indigenous peoples and many Eastern cultures and others have always know. First of all, we are all spiritual beings and this dimension of ourselves must be addressed to realize our true potential. The spiritual aspect of a person must be treated to intervene effectively when things have gone wrong or when we need extra support.

There has been an international association for Transpersonal Psychology for over ten years and Transpersonal Psychology has become a recognized subdivision of The American Psychological Association, APA. There are several institutions of higher education in the United States where a graduate degree in psychology with a transpersonal emphasis is offered.

4. Transpersonal Psychology Is A Methodology For a Multicultural Spiritual Approach To Many Of Today's Counseling Needs

Transpersonal Psychology shares core experiences and understandings with many Eastern religions and many indigenous spiritual belief and healing systems. With this newest "force" in psychology, we in the modern scientific West are discovering and embracing what we have ignored or dismissed in other cultures. This is an interesting development in psychology, one that merits serious contemplation. It is equally interesting that if we trace our spiritual traditions back far enough, no matter what culture we are from, we arrive at a similar place. This place has an accepted norm of individuals having a direct experience of "oneness" with the Creator and creation.

The field of Transpersonal Psychology is both eclectic and ecumenical, recognizing the spiritual dimension of our being and our world and the need to treat this part of ourselves along with our mental, emotional, and behavioral selves in an integrated way. This a "given in the Navajo spiritual belief and healing system and the understood purpose of ceremonies and prayers.

Joseph Campbell is perhaps the most famous person of recent times to bring to popular attention that there is a universal experience of "oneness" that is expressed globally in culture specific myths and rituals.

It is not commonly known in Western psychology that Carl Jung broke with Sigmond Freud over what he called, "the suppression of the sublime".

The "Energy Body", upon which the more than five thousand year old Eastern practice of acupuncture is based, simply does not exist in modern Western medicine. The energy body also does not exist in the modern Western paradigm of who we are as human beings. Yet when a Navajo medicine man works to bring any life problem or situation into harmony/balance for an individual, he will work with this unseen dimension moving along and slightly above the body of the patient/client with the exact same movements that would restore the proper flow of the energy body in the meridians known in acupuncture. There are very simple and short exercises which can demonstrate the existence of the energy body. The practice of Karate incorporates this knowledge. Nurses are being trained in "therapeutic touch" and work with the energy body of patients.

AA and other twelve step programs for addictions of all kinds could be classified as transpersonal interventions. The spiritual aspect of these programs is believed to be what is responsible for their success. Twelve step programs are international and easily adapted in various cultural settings.

5. Some Methods And Tools From Transpersonal Psychology

Progoff Intensive Journal Work

Dream Work

Meditation /Relaxation Therapy/Breathing

Affirmations

Simple Rituals

Prayer

Energy Body Exercises/Therapeutic Touch

Being With Nature/The Earth-Earth Prayers

These types of practices/interventions can facilitate our being connected to our inner and outer selves and to the Creator and creation. Thus we can have a sense of worth, a sense of belonging, and a sense of safety no matter what our external realities.

This does not replace conventional counseling or cure social problems. Transpersonal methods of intervention work best when integrated with other modalities.

For eclectic Counselors there is the belief that if a client's thinking changes then the client's feelings and behavior will follow. Also, if the client's behavior changes then the client's feelings and thinking will follow. In addition, if the client's feelings change then the client's thinking and behavior will follow. When using various methods to change all of these at once, you usually get the quickest and most dramatic results. For the counselor also using transpersonal methods, the client's spiritual reality would be added as a dimension of the person and a place of intervention. Therefore, when a client's spiritual reality changes then the client's thinking, feeling, and behavior also change etc.

6. "Being A Decent Human Being Is A Modern Way To Be A Warrior"

Larry Anderson, Navajo Elder

A few years ago, Larry Anderson was asked to speak to the students of our middle school when an Anglo teacher-wrestling coach had died overnight in a car wreck. Part of what he said was, "Being a decent human being is a modern way to be a warrior. Joe Droll was a decent human being." This statement has stayed in my mind, both as a personal motto and as an image and value to incorporate into my counseling work with Navajo students.

Somehow decency is a good word for what more and more needs to be achieved or reclaimed in our lives, in society, and in our work as counselors. We cannot wait on social policy and economic solutions etc. We can learn more about violence, resilient children, PTSD, dysfunctional family dynamics, and addiction, etc. We can remember to focus on the client in front of us when we feel overwhelmed by what is happening in our communities and society at large. We can stay focused on the process instead of the results in order to prevent burn out. I believe that it is also helpful to us as well as our clients to have a larger view with a spiritual base and some kind of compass for where we want to go and how to get there.

Conclusion

Transpersonal psychology can provide both multicultural and even culture free methods and practices to support us and our clients on our journey to a better future where respect for culture, self, others, and life itself is something that is not being severely eroded.

We need to recreate a world where students are not afraid to come to school because they are afraid of each other and where adults are not afraid of young people. This means a world where violence is drastically decreased.

Right now, it appears that we need to consciously and deliberately foster self actualization in the midst of adversity. Transpersonal psychology is one tool for accomplishing this.

Note:

Relevant Handouts Will Be Provided

Brief Experiential Exercises/Demonstrations will be included.